



To: Town Council Standing Committee on Outreach, Communications, and Appointments (OCA)

From: George Ryan, OCA Designee for Participatory Budgeting Commission

Date: 05-22-2019

RE: Recommended Appointments to the Participatory Budgeting Commission [Charter Sec. 10.11]

I request that OCA recommend the following individuals to the full Town Council for appointment to the Participatory Budgeting Commission:

1. Meg Gage
2. Elizabeth Larson

Recommended appointee profiles:

Meg Gage: Meg, as a member of the Charter Commission, a member of Town Meeting from 1989 to 2018, and a member of the Town Meeting Advisory Committee, clearly possesses a breadth of experience and knowledge of the Town and Town affairs. She also possesses no small amount of familiarity with the idea Participatory Budgeting based on her own research of the topic. She also manifests a deep personal commitment to broadening citizen participation in town government. She expressed a particular desire to involve the youth in Amherst in this process, including middle school and high school students. While she has an obvious enthusiasm and passion for the idea of participatory budgeting she did acknowledge when asked that she would be open to the possibility that such a body may not be appropriate to Amherst.

Elizabeth Larson: Liz brings a number of skills and life experiences that seem particularly relevant to this body. Her work currently as the bookkeeper for Amherst BID and her volunteer service as treasurer for a number of political campaigns as well as for the Amherst PGO give her experience working with numbers and budgeting processes. During the interview itself her obvious passion for making Amherst town government more democratic and accessible to the broader public fits well in regards to one of the key goals of Participatory Budgeting. On her own she had begun to do research into other towns and communities that have adopted participatory budgeting and she also showed an awareness of the challenge the commission will face in finding the right balance between the overall good of the town and voices of particular advocacy groups.



Applicant evaluation criteria

OCA did not provide any evaluation criteria or selection guidelines to assist the OCA Designee in selecting candidates. When selecting candidates, I considered the following:

- The commission should consist of a range of experiences, expertise, and perspectives.
- The commission should consist of members who have skills related to the various aspects and stages of implementing participatory budgeting (i.e. researching existing models and best practices, some familiarity with budgeting process and budgets, interest in broadening the level of citizen involvement in town government).
- Appointees should demonstrate an ability to successfully collaborate with other members of a multiple-member body.
- Preference for candidates who demonstrated existing knowledge of participatory budgeting, and that different models of participatory budgeting exist.
- Preference for candidates who acknowledged the challenges inherent in the commission's task of balancing town's fiscal realities with the desire to increase citizen involvement.

Overview of the process to recommend appointees to the Ranked-Choice Voting Commission

Applications

The Town Council established the Participatory Budgeting Commission on 12-10-2019, after which residents could apply to become members. Applicants to multiple-member bodies submit an online Community Activity Form (CAF), previously known as Citizen Activity Form. On 02-20-2019, OCA solicited applications via the Town website under "News & Announcements" and via Newsflash to subscribers. The Town received CAFs for the commission from 12-31-2018 through 05-12-2019. The Town Manager's office established that all applicants are current residents under Charter Sec. 3.3 and forwarded CAFs to the OCA Designee on 05-13-2019.

In continuation of past practice, and as recently confirmed by the Town Attorney, any current submitted CAF is a personnel document not subject to public records disclosure. Therefore, Councilors cannot deliberate on or bring into consideration any submitted CAF in an open session. Executive session could only be invoked in a very narrow set of circumstances, and OCA



chose not to pursue that path after extensive discussion by speaker phone with the Town Attorney during an open session. In continuation of past practice and with an emphasis on protecting the privacy concerns of applicants, OCA does not release names of applicants and numbers of applicants.

Interviews

To comply with Open Meeting Law, OCA voted 04-29-2019 to designate George Ryan as the OCA Designee to conduct all the interviews for the Participatory Budgeting Commission.

The Town Manager's office offered every resident applicant an interview. All those who accepted were brought in for in-person interviews and those interviews took place on 05-16-2019. The interview team consisted of the OCA Designee, the Town Manager, the Town Comptroller, and a member of the Resident Advisory Committee. The composition of the interview team reflects the joint appointing authority of the Participatory Budgeting Commission (Charter Sec. 10.11). The OCA Designee used the standard set of interview questions OCA adopted on 04-08-2019 (see attached) while the other members asked additional questions at their discretion.

Evaluation

Following interviews, the interview team discussed all interviewed applicants and came to consensus around four candidates. The Town Manager and OCA Designee then discussed which two candidates would be appointees of the Town Manager and which two candidates would be appointees of the Town Council (see Charter Sec. 10.11). The OCA Designee emailed all Town Council recommended appointees the following:

Dear _____,

*As the interview designee for Outreach, Communications, and Appointments Committee (OCA), tasked with bringing forth recommended appointees to the Participatory Budgeting Commission for appointment by the Town Council. I am writing to you today to let you know that I will be bringing your name forward to OCA as a nominee to the Participatory Budgeting Commission. **Please confirm that you are willing to accept this appointment as soon as possible.***



*The process for appointment will be as follows. On Friday, May 17th, 2019, I will be publicly posting a report that will include my recommended appointees to the Participatory Budgeting Commission, including names, evaluation criteria, and a description of the process. **Please confirm that you are willing to have your name publicly published as a recommended appointee.***

On Wednesday, May 22nd, 2019, at 8:30 AM in The Town Room in Town Hall the Outreach, Communications, and Appointments Committee will meet to discuss my recommended appointees and potentially vote on whether to recommend them to the Town Council for appointment. Note that this email does not guarantee appointment. Successful appointment requires the affirmative votes of the Outreach, Communications, and Appointments Committee and the Town Council.

Thank you again for your interest in serving your town.

Best,

George Ryan

I also spoke by phone with both recommended appointees and received from both confirmation of their desire to proceed and willingness to have their names made public.

Demographics

It must be acknowledged up front that this is a very small pool (4) and that one of the candidates did not provide any demographic data. It is the practice of OCA to only report what applicants self-report. There is also a concern over applicant privacy when one has such a small pool. My personal preference would be to collect demographic data over a period of time rather than on a case by case basis both for reasons of privacy and because such small data sets by themselves are not sufficient to draw firm conclusions. Having said that the data is as follows:

Age: one candidate self-identified as between 50-59, one between 60-69, and one between 18-29.

Race: one candidate self-identified as “white”, one as “European”, and one as “North European”.

Gender: two candidates self-identified as male, one as female.



Legal References

Charter Sec. 10.11: CREATION OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING COMMISSION

Within 6 months of the assumption of office by the Town Council, the Town Council shall create a Participatory Budgeting Commission for the purpose of proposing a measure to adopt participatory budgeting or other similar method of resident participation in the budgeting process in Amherst. The commission shall consist of 7 members: 1 shall be the Finance Director or designee, 1 shall be a Town Council member, 2 shall be residents appointed by the Town Council, and 3 shall be residents appointed by the Town Manager. The Commission shall propose a measure to the Town Council by December 1, 2020. The Town Council shall act by voting upon the proposed measure with or without amendments within 90 days of receipt.

Charter Sec. 9.12(e): SECTION 9.12: UNIFORM PROCEDURES APPLICABLE TO MULTIPLE-MEMBER BODIES

(e) Vacancies: Whenever a vacancy occurs, or is about to occur, on a multiple-member body, the appointing authority shall immediately cause public notice of the vacancy, or impending vacancy, to be published on the Town bulletin board for a period of not less than 14 days. Any person who desires to be considered for appointment to the multiple-member body shall file with the appointing authority a statement in clear and specific terms setting forth the person's interest and experience.



Standard Interview Questions adopted by OCA 04-08-2019

1. Welcome, thanks for taking time to fill out form and apply
2. Why did you apply? How did you learn about the vacancy?
3. Have you ever watched or attended one of their meetings? Looked at their webpage?
4. What is your relevant expertise and/or experience?
5. What important perspective do you feel you bring to this body?
6. Tell us about an experience you have had collaborating with a group?
7. Are you comfortable working under Open Meeting Law, where all discussions and decisions are done in meetings posted at least 48 hours in advance and open to the public?
8. What about the time commitment and committee meeting schedule on the provided handout?
9. Do you have any questions for us or anything else you want to share with us?
10. Thank you – let them know about process going forward and time frame. Everyone will be contacted, whether selected or not.